

**National Public Health Week
Designing Healthy Communities: Raising Healthy Kids**

Active Children Fact Sheet

The Facts on Children and Physical Activity¹

- Children in the United States today are less fit than they were a generation ago. Many are showing early signs of cardiovascular risk factors such as physical inactivity, excess weight, higher blood cholesterol and cigarette smoking.
- Inactive children, when compared with active children, weigh more, have higher blood pressure and lower levels of heart-protective high-density lipoproteins (HDL cholesterol).
- Even though heart attack and stroke are rare in children, evidence shows that the process leading to those conditions begins in childhood.
- Data from the 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Survey indicate that 33.4 percent of youth don't engage in physical activity that promotes long-term health.
- Children spend an average of three to four hours per day watching TV.
- Inactive children are more likely to become inactive adults.
- Healthy lifestyle training should start in childhood to promote improved cardiovascular health in adult life. The following good health practices should be promoted among children:
 - regular physical activity
 - a low-saturated-fat, low-cholesterol diet after age 2
 - smoking prevention
 - healthy weight
 - regular pediatric medical checkups

Why is physical activity important for kids?

The American Heart Association* reports that increased physical activity has been associated with an increased life expectancy and decreased risk of cardiovascular disease. Physical activity produces overall physical, psychological and social benefits.

Physical activity helps kids with:

- maintaining a healthy weight
- reducing blood pressure
- raising HDL ("good") cholesterol
- reducing the risk of diabetes and some kinds of cancer
- improved psychological well-being, including gaining more self-confidence and higher self-esteem

How much should kids exercise?

The American Heart Association recommends that all children age 2 and older should participate in at least 30 minutes of enjoyable, moderate-intensity activities every day. They should also perform at least 30 minutes of vigorous physical activities at least 3 to 4 days each week to achieve and maintain a good level of cardiorespiratory (heart and lung) fitness.

If your children don't have a full 30-minute activity break each day, try to provide at least two 15-minute periods or three 10-minute periods in which they can engage in vigorous activities appropriate to their age, gender and stage of physical and emotional development.

Top Ten Ways to Help Children Develop Healthy Habits²

1. Be a positive role model. If you're practicing healthy habits, it's a lot easier to convince children to do the same.
2. Get the whole family active. Plan times for everyone to get moving together. Take walks, ride bikes, go swimming, garden or just play hide-and-seek outside. Everyone will benefit from the exercise and the time together.
3. Limit TV, video game and computer time. These habits lead to a sedentary lifestyle and excessive snacking, which increase risks for obesity and cardiovascular disease.
4. Encourage physical activities that children really enjoy. Every child is unique. Let children experiment with different activities until each finds something that he or she really loves doing. They'll stick with it longer if they love it.
5. Be supportive. Focus on the positive instead of the negative. Everyone likes to be praised for a job well done. Celebrate successes and help children and teens develop a good self-image.
6. Set specific goals and limits, such as one hour of physical activity a day or two desserts per week other than fruit. When goals are too abstract or limits too restrictive, the chance for success decreases.
7. Don't reward children with food. Candy and snacks as a reward encourage bad habits. Find other ways to celebrate good behavior.
8. Make dinnertime a family time. When everyone sits down together to eat, there's less chance of children eating the wrong foods or snacking too much. Get the kids involved in cooking and planning meals. Everyone develops good eating habits together and the quality time with the family will be an added bonus.
9. Make a game of reading food labels. The whole family will learn what's good for their health and be more conscious of what they eat. It's a habit that helps change behavior for a lifetime.
10. Stay involved. Be an advocate for healthier children. Insist on good food choices at school. Make sure your children's healthcare providers are monitoring cardiovascular indicators like BMI, blood pressure and cholesterol. Contact public officials on matters of the heart. Make your voice heard.

Children's Health and the Built Environment³

Healthy community design can benefit children in many important ways. At a time when obesity and diabetes are rising among children, when asthma continues to be highly prevalent and when conditions such as attention deficit disorder may be on the rise, it is crucial to seek,

understand, and implement environmental design solutions that might help with these health challenges.

School design is one example of how the built environment can influence children's health. When new schools are built at a long distance from where families live, then children need to be driven to school, depriving them of an opportunity for physical activity and contributing to air pollution and risk for automobile crashes. On the other hand, if schools are located within walking or biking distance of where people live, and if safe routes to school are provided, then children can make walking or biking a part of their daily lives, establishing healthy habits that can last a lifetime. Much is now known about designing and building (or renovating) schools in ways that promote children's health and school performance, providing plenty of light and fresh air, and using building materials that do not pose hazards to children.

Parks and green spaces are another example. Research increasingly suggests that children benefit from the opportunity to play outdoors, where they can explore and enjoy natural environments. Planning parks near residential areas -- and making sure that the parks include attractive landscaping, well-designed amenities such as playgrounds and sports facilities, and safe routes leading to and from them -- can be invaluable as part of a strategy of community design that is healthy and nurturing for children.

Safe Routes to School

Safe Routes to School (SR2S) is an international movement to make it safe, convenient and fun for children to bicycle and walk to school. When routes are safe, walking or biking to and from school is an easy way to get the regular physical activity children need for good health. Safe Routes to School initiatives also help ease traffic jams and air pollution, unite neighborhoods and contribute to students' readiness to learn in school.

The purpose of Safe Routes to School (SR2S) is to enable and encourage children, including those with disabilities, to walk and bicycle to school; to make walking and biking to school safe and more appealing, and to facilitate the planning, development and implementation of projects that will improve safety and reduce traffic, fuel consumption, and air pollution in the vicinity of schools.

In Michigan and elsewhere, establishing safe routes to school is accomplished through the "5 Es":

1. Education: teaching safe walking and biking skills
2. Encouragement: designing approaches to shift parent and/or student motivation
3. Enforcement: discouraging dangerous behaviors
4. Engineering: improving the physical setting
5. Evaluation: measuring SR2S attitudes, beliefs, behaviors and outcomes.

Easy to remember and understand, the "5 Es" are used by advocates for Safe Routes to School to describe the range of problems and solutions associated with walking and biking to school, as well as the importance of evaluation. When barriers to safe walking and biking are addressed with a combination of 5E strategies, greater success is likely.

For more information on Safe Routes to School in Michigan visit www.saferoutesmichigan.org

Michigan's Exemplary Physical Education Curriculum

It is hard to change the sedentary habits of adults that have been formed over a lifetime. Experts agree that childhood is the time to begin development of active lifestyles by equipping our young people with the fitness levels, knowledge, motor skills and personal/social skills they need to be active now and in the future. To this end the Governor's Council on Physical Activity, Health and Sports was charged with establishing a model physical education program. The result is Michigan's Exemplary Physical Education Curriculum (EPEC) Project, a public health initiative established as a long-term investment in the health of the citizens of Michigan. The mission of EPEC is to develop, test and disseminate materials and procedures that enable schools to achieve the public health goal of promoting lifelong physical activity.

Benefits for students

- Development of fitness (i.e., aerobic capacity, muscular flexibility, muscular strength/endurance).
- Acquisition of activity-related knowledge.
- Development of motor skills including locomotor and object control skills.
- Acquisition of personal/social skills.
- Increased self esteem and self concept.

Benefits for families

- Acquisition of activity-related knowledge of the importance of physical fitness and physical activity.
- Engagement in physical activity at home associated with student homework.
- Promotion of healthy lifestyles by supporting physical activity.

Benefits for physical educators

- Ability to teach lessons that include important objectives defined by stakeholders.
- Opportunity to increase support for physical education programs via documentation of student achievement.
- Opportunity to increase students' activity levels and skill acquisition via homework.

Benefits for schools

- Minimal planning in the areas of curriculum and instruction.
- Provide instruction that prepares students for healthy, productive citizenship.
- Opportunity to assess the effectiveness of the program and to adapt it to better meet the needs of youth and/or the community.

Benefits for communities

- Development of physical fitness in youth and their families.
- Improvement of the health status of youth and their families.
- Maintenance or expansion of the physical education program.
- Motivation for youth to participate in healthy community activities.

EPEC is changing the way educators think about physical education. Built around NASPE content standards and strong on assessment, EPEC is being used by thousands of teachers to strengthen physical education, and its reputation, in their communities.

For more information on EPEC visit www.michiganfitness.org/EPEC/

Walk to School Day

Walk to School Day is an international event sponsored by the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness, Health and Sports, Michigan Department of Community Health, and the Michigan Department of Transportation.

Walk to School Day:

- Encourages physical fitness
- Raises awareness of traffic/walking safety
- Creates environmental awareness of air quality around schools
- Provides a quality experience for families
- Is a great way to start a Safe Routes to School initiative

Please join in the effort to promote walking to school as a way to provide an opportunity for even more physical activity! Go <http://saferoutesmichigan.drum-server.com/w2sd.htm> for more information.

All Children Exercising Simultaneously

Each May, millions of school children all over the globe will exercise simultaneously in a symbolic gesture of fitness and unity. This non-competitive program has proven to be educational, motivational, and fun. Starting its 17th year, ACES has reached millions of children, parents, and teachers all over the world, including participants from over 50 countries.

Governor Jennifer M. Granholm and the first gentleman, Dan Mulhern are the 2006 Honorary Co-Chairs of ACES. ACES 2006 will be held on May 3rd at 10:00 a.m (or any day/time that your school can participate).

Registered schools receive:

- ACES With-a-Friend sticker for every child
- Letter of congratulations from the co-chairs
- ACES Newsletter for families
- Certificate of participation signed by Governor Jennifer M. Granholm
- Press Release to personalize for your school
- Post-event Response Form

For more information on ACES 2006 visit <http://www.michiganfitness.org/aces/>

Other Ways to Incorporate Activity into Schools⁴

In addition to physical education, schools can promote physical activity in a variety of other ways:

- Promote collaboration between physical education and classroom teachers. For example, physical education teachers might provide ideas for "fitness breaks" to classroom teachers, where 5-minute aerobic activities could be used to break up the school day.

- Provide extracurricular physical activity programs. Interested teachers and parents might be encouraged to establish developmentally appropriate clubs and/or intramural activities of a competitive and noncompetitive nature. Walking clubs, in-line skating, jumping rope, water aerobics, and intramural swim teams provide a few examples.
- Coordinate physical activities with community agencies. Schools might allow use of school facilities by community agencies that sponsor physical activity programs, facilitate training programs for volunteer youth coaches, invite community groups to an "activity fair" for students in the school gymnasium, or provide a listing of community physical activity resources to students.
- Encourage and enable parental involvement in physical activity. Parental activity level is very important in promoting activity among children. Schools can help encourage activity in parents by sending home activity homework that parents and children do together, recruiting parent volunteers for physical education classes, and sponsoring parent-child activity programs at school.
- Provide physical and social environments that encourage and enable physical activity. For example, schools might allow access to facilities before and after school hours and during vacation periods, encourage teachers to provide time for unstructured physical activity during recess and during physical education class, and help school personnel to serve as active role models by enabling and encouraging their own participation in physical activity.

Resources from Michigan Health Tools: A gateway to better health in Michigan.

Where do I start? How do I know what the community wants and/or needs? The most logical answer to this question is to complete an assessment of the nutrition environment of the community. Tools are available to address healthy eating in communities and schools at <http://mihealthtools.org/>.

- **Healthy Community Checklist:** Discover the ways in which your community makes it easy for its residents to be healthy. The website features a 40-item quick assessment of a community's health environment related to promoting physical activity, healthy eating/healthy weight, and tobacco-free lifestyles.
- **Healthy School Action Tool:** Aimed at bettering the health of our children by focusing on school environments where children spend much of their time. Healthy schools improve academic performance and help students establish positive habits that can last a lifetime. The Healthy Schools websites feature the Healthy School Action Tool, a self-assessment and planning instrument to help schools take positive action, and the Healthy School Environment Recognition Program, to recognize schools who have demonstrated significant accomplishments in creating healthy environments.
- **Promoting Active Communities:** Active Community Environments are places where people are able, comfortable and inspired to use their feet to get them places. In other words, people of all ages and abilities can walk and bike both for recreation *and* for transportation. The **Promoting Active Community Award: Community Self-Assessment Inventory** was developed in partnership with the Michigan Department of Community Health to assist communities with a goal of making it easier for residents to be physically active.

Communities use this tool to:

- Provide strategic analyses of the community's policies and zoning, pedestrian and bike facilities and programs, worksites, schools and public transportation.
- Gain recognition for achievements in removing barriers to make it easier for people to be active.
- Educate and motivate community leaders and citizens to make relevant improvements to the pedestrian and bicycle environments.

Communities who complete the assessment will earn one of five levels of awards to be given at an annual conference. In addition, participating communities will also receive automated reports, including a community report of achievement with comparative data to other communities of similar size.

Other Key Websites:

- www.michiganfitness.org The Governor's Council on Physical Fitness, Health and Sports and the Michigan Fitness Foundation are working to improve the health of the people of Michigan by promoting the health benefits of physical activity and creating behavior-changing programs that equip Michigan citizens to lead a physically active lifestyle. We are focused on preventing chronic disease and reversing the trend toward sedentary living. The Governor's Council works with communities coordinating Walk to School Day, ACES, Promoting Active Communities, and Safe Routes to School.
- http://www.actionforhealthykids.org/state_profile.php?state=MI Michigan Action for Healthy Kids (MI AFHK) is concentrating their efforts to ensure healthful foods are provided throughout the entire school environment and that schools offer quality, daily physical activity.
- <http://www.walktoschool-usa.org/> Each October, millions of children, parents, teachers and community leaders across the globe walk to school to celebrate International Walk to School Day and, since 2003, International Walk to School Week. It is an energizing event, reminding parents and children alike of the simple joy of walking to school. It also serves as an opportunity to focus on the importance of physical activity, safety, air quality and walkable communities. Walk to School activities often become a catalyst for on-going efforts to increase safe walking and bicycling all of the time.
- www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/aces.htm CDC's Active Community Environments Initiative (ACES) promotes walking, bicycling, and the development of accessible recreation facilities. It was developed in response to data from a variety of disciplines, including public health, urban design, and transportation planning. These data suggest characteristics of our communities such as proximity of facilities, street design, density of housing, availability of public transit and of pedestrian and bicycle facilities play a significant role in promoting or discouraging physical activity.
- www.activelivingbydesign.org Active Living by Design is a national program of The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and is a part of the UNC School of Public Health in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. This program establishes innovative approaches to increase physical activity through community design, public policies and communications strategies.

- www.smartgrowthamerica.org Smart Growth America is a coalition of national, state and local organizations working to improve the ways we plan and build the towns, cities and metro areas we call home. The coalition includes many of the best-known national organizations advocating on behalf of historic preservation, the environment, farmland and open space preservation, neighborhood revitalization and more. Our state- and regional-level members are community-based organizations working to save treasured landscapes while making our towns and cities ever more livable and lovable.
- www.walkable.org/index.htm Walkable Communities, Inc. was established in the state of Florida in 1996. It was organized for the express purposes of helping whole communities, whether they are large cities or small towns, or parts of communities, i.e. neighborhoods, business districts, parks, school districts, subdivisions, specific roadway corridors, etc., become more walkable and pedestrian friendly.
- www.bikewalk.org National Center for Bicycling and Walking (NCBW) is the major program of the Bicycle Federation of America, Inc. (BFA), a national, nonprofit [501(c)(3)] corporation established in 1977. NCBW's mission is to create bicycle-friendly and walkable communities. The NCBW is governed by a volunteer board of directors and operates from offices located in Bethesda, MD (headquarters); Chestertown, MD; Maplewood, NJ; Missoula, MT; and the Silver Twinkie (OR).
- www.bicyclinginfo.org Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center is a clearinghouse for information about health and safety, engineering, advocacy, education, enforcement and access and mobility. The PBIC serves anyone interested in pedestrian and bicycle issues, including planners, engineers, private citizens, advocates, educators, police enforcement and the health community.
- <http://www.ncppa.org/> The National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity's mission is to unite the strengths of public, private, and industry efforts into collaborative partnerships that inspire and empower all Americans to lead more physically active lifestyles. NCPPA is an extraordinary group of national organizations that independently address a host of issues pertaining to physical activity including health/science, education, environments, population specific outreach, and activity behavior.
- <http://www.ncpad.org/> The National Center on Physical Activity and Disability is an information center concerned with physical activity and disability.
- <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3007589> This URL links to American Heart Association Programs, Heart & Stroke Encyclopedia entries and Scientific Statements related to children and exercise.
- <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/DNPAProg/SearchV.asp?State=MI> The CDC's Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity State-based Physical Activity Program Directory site provides information about physical activity programs involving state departments of health. Use this site to research programs, gather ideas, and share information.
- <http://www.cdc.gov/youthcampaign/> **VERB™ It's what you do.** is a national, multicultural, social marketing campaign* coordinated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The VERB campaign encourages young people ages 9–13 (twens) years to be physically active every day. The

campaign combines paid advertising, marketing strategies, and partnership efforts to reach the distinct audiences of tweens and adults/influencers.

- <http://4girls.gov/fitness/index.htm> The GirlsHealth.gov website was created to help girls (ages 10-16) learn about health, growing up, and issues they may face. It focuses on health topics that girls are concerned about and helps motivate them to choose healthy behaviors by using positive, supportive, and non-threatening messages. The site gives girls reliable, useful information on the health issues they will face as they become young women and tips on handling relationships with family and friends, at school and at home.
- http://www.bam.gov/sub_physicalactivity/index.html *BAM! Body and Mind* is an online destination for kids created by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Designed for kids 9-13 years old, *BAM! Body and Mind* gives them the information they need to make healthy lifestyle choices. The site focuses on topics that kids told us are important to them - such as stress and physical fitness - using kid-friendly lingo, games, quizzes, and other interactive features. *BAM! Body and Mind* also serves as an aid to teachers, providing them with interactive, educational, and fun activities that are linked to the national education standards for science and health.
- <http://www.girlsontherun.org/> Girls on the Run is a non-profit prevention program that encourages preteen girls to develop self-respect and healthy lifestyles through running. Our curricula address all aspects of girls' development - their physical, emotional, mental, social and spiritual well-being.

Other Key Resources

Position Paper of the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness, Health and Sports in partnership with the Michigan Department of Community Health:

[The Importance of Physical Activity for Children and Adolescents](#)

Executive Summary from the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness, Health and Sports:

[The Cost of Physical Inactivity in Michigan](#)

A publication of the Michigan Department of Education in partnership with Michigan's Department of Community Health and the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness, Health and Sports:

[The Role Michigan Schools in Promoting Healthy Weight](#)

Publication of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

[The Obesity Epidemic and Michigan Students](#)

International Walk to School Day:

[Safety Tips for Walking and Biking to School](#)

Active Transportation information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

[KidsWalk-to-School: Then and Now — Barriers and Solutions](#)

Fact Sheet from the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence:

[School Violence](#)

References

- 1 American Heart Association <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3007589>
- 2 American Heart Association: <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3030485>
- 3 Centers for Disease Control & Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/healthtopics/children.htm>
- 4 Excerpt from Kids Source Online: <http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content4/promote.phyed.html>